

Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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The Philippines: Outlook for the National Assembly Election.

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Summary

The stakes in the National Assembly election on 14 May are high for President Marcos, the ruling party (Kilusang Bagong Lipunan--KBL), and the moderate opposition. All face a key test of their popular support in the aftermath of the Aquino assassination. KBL and opposition politicians, moreover, believe that a good showing is important to their influence in post-Marcos politics.

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The KBL's financial and organizational advantages, combined with electoral machinery beholden to Marcos, suggest the party will win an overwhelming majority. Depending on the extent of the KBL's heavy-handedness in falsifying election returns, however, the opposition could win a larger minority share of the Assembly than it retains at present. Such an outcome, nonetheless, would allow Marcos to retain control over the Assembly and--if the election passed with little violence--the ruling party could claim to have achieved a popular mandate.

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Continued political polarization and protest demonstrations are a considerable risk, however, if Marcos is too blatant in manipulating election results. Charges of election rigging are certain in any event, and because public discontent with his rule remains widespread, Marcos will almost certainly achieve less than he hopes for.

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] Islands Branch, Southeast Asia Division, Office of East Asian Analysis. Information available as of 7 May was used in its preparation. Comments are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Southeast Asia Division [redacted]

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Background

Since martial law ended in January 1981, international and domestic observers have looked to the National Assembly election next Monday as a critical step toward long-term political normalization and stability in the Philippines. President Marcos also has been pressed during the past several years to strengthen democratic institutions in order to ensure a smooth transition to a popular, centrist government when he steps down. The National Assembly election represents the first formal test of his willingness to allow the development of a more competitive political system. Accordingly, he has made several concessions to the opposition during the last four months in order to gain their participation and make the election appear credible (see the chart for a profile of the major contenders). [redacted]

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The election will provide most of the members for a permanent, democratic national legislature. At stake are 183 elective seats; Marcos will appoint another 17 assemblymen, who will represent different sectoral organizations in Philippine society, such as labor, education, and agriculture. The current Interim National Assembly--elected in 1978 in a contest widely perceived to be fraudulent--contains only 12 opposition members, a number widely believed to underestimate the opposition's popular support. [redacted]

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The Stakes

Marcos almost certainly believes an impressive victory by his party will reassert his authority as the country's preeminent political force. Since the assassination of Benigno Aquino last August, he has been increasingly criticized by businessmen, the church, and the opposition for failing to deal forthrightly with the assassination investigation. The ruling party has been taken to task on economic issues as the country's financial crisis has continued unabated, and the government's talks with the IMF over the conditions of a new balance-of-payments loan have remained at an impasse. [redacted]

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Marcos, in our judgment, is counting on a sizable KBL victory to defuse the assassination as an issue and assuage the fears of international creditors, who hope the election will be a step toward political stability. With a strong showing by the KBL, Marcos also can claim that he rules by popular mandate, thus legitimizing calls for sacrifice if--as seems likely--he implements painful austerity measures in the coming months. [redacted]

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The political careers of many old-line KBL stalwarts are also at stake. [redacted] they believe they can no longer count on a popular leader and a mute opposition to allow them to retain the power they have acquired as members of the ruling party. As a result, we believe local

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KBL kingpins will use any means necessary to seize the largest possible share of the votes, even in those areas where Marcos has privately conceded an opposition victory. [redacted]

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For members of the moderate opposition, the election represents an opportunity not only to revive their political careers, but to position themselves for the succession struggle they believe is inevitable in the next few years. For this reason, groups such as the United Nationalist Democratic Organization (UNIDO), the Pilipino Democratic Party-Lakas ng Bayan (PDP-Laban) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) have decided to participate in the election despite Marcos's unwillingness to concede to all of their demands. [redacted]

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In an attempt to tap anti-regime sentiment, the opposition has threatened to begin impeachment proceedings against Marcos after the election. Although it would need a two-thirds majority in the Assembly to succeed, it only needs to control 40 seats to introduce an impeachment resolution. This threat will force Marcos to limit opposition numbers in the new National Assembly.

[redacted]

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The Campaign Trail

Under the most favorable circumstances, the Philippines would be hard pressed to hold a "fair" election. Popular elections have traditionally served to legitimize the influence of local families in the patron-client system that dominates Philippine economic and political life. Before martial law, personality politics dominated elections, and party switching, vote buying, and election fraud were common. Election victory depended on who could deliver the goods, and thus the vote. Little has changed in recent years. [redacted]

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The KBL's strategy depends on the ability of its regional kingpins to carry the election in the countryside through superior financing and local influence. [redacted]

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The KBL has ensured that it will win in certain key areas. In Tarlac Province--a political base for both Aquino and Cojuangco--7000 M-16 rifles were distributed to civilian defense forces prior to registration drives in March, ostensibly to maintain peace and order in the region. According to the US Embassy, the weapons are probably intended to influence voting on election day and discourage opposition efforts to promote a boycott. Such heavy handed tactics should ensure that key Marcos political allies now in the Interim Assembly are elected to the new Assembly.

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The KBL will resort to fraud if it proves necessary. Marcos has bolstered his party's chances by allowing the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) to lay groundwork that will facilitate vote rigging should the KBL fail to win majorities in key cities and provinces.*

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In addition, the commission has decided to allow private companies to print ballots, which will make ballot fraud easier.

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COMELEC also has the power to accredit official citizen's watchdog groups, which will be responsible for monitoring polling places nationwide. The National Citizen's Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL), an independent civic organization, was accredited to monitor new voter registration drives in early spring and it exposed blatant KBL attempts to pad registration lists, particularly in Manila. In apparent anticipation of NAMFREL's discoveries, COMELEC moved in March to accredit another watchdog group--The Movement of Organized Volunteers for Enlightenment and Reform (MOVER). According to the US Embassy, MOVER's leadership has close ties to the Marcos administration and is planning to concentrate its poll watching in urban areas where support for Marcos is weakest.

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Marcos has further muddied the political waters by aiding a false opposition group which may draw votes away from UNIDO and

*Marcos has given COMELEC's nine members the authority to regulate the National Assembly elections. Among COMELEC's responsibilities is the power to interpret the election code and monitor the results of the election.

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PDP-Laban candidates--the Roy wing of the Nacionalista Party.* COMELEC has accredited the group as the "dominant" opposition party in one or two key provinces where the KBL is weak. In these regions, Marcos can manipulate returns to ensure that a sympathetic Roy Nacionalista wins the election or orchestrate a KBL victory by splitting the vote between moderate opposition and the Roy Nacionalista candidates. [redacted]

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Opposition Strategy

Since the Aquino assassination, opposition strategy has focused on an ongoing battle with Marcos over the election rules. In addition to voting according to provincial boundaries--which will presumably help the opposition achieve at least some representation in regions where the KBL will win an overall majority--the moderate opposition has demanded the reinstatement of the vice presidency, repeal of the constitutional amendment that allows Marcos to legislate by decree, and the nationwide reregistration of voters. Marcos has conceded on the issues of the vice presidency and voter registration, and most of the opposition has decided to participate in the election. [redacted]

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The opposition campaign effort has remained ineffective because of chronic rifts. In many areas, opposition groups are running competing candidate slates because they are unable to agree on a unified ticket. According to the US Embassy, many wealthy opposition members have been reluctant to commit money to candidates until they are sure that opposition members will participate in the elections. Two weeks prior to the voting, COMELEC still had not compiled a list of opposition candidates. In sum, opposition groups have little or no integrated national campaign effort and are counting on popular anti-government sentiment to win seats. [redacted]

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Possible Outcomes

[redacted]
Marcos's recent moves to stack election odds heavily in the KBL's favor suggest he is willing to sacrifice the appearance of a credible election in order to ensure a KBL landslide. [redacted]

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*The split in the Nacionalista Party occurred just prior to the presidential elections in 1981 when the faction of the Nacionalista Party led by Jose Laurel decided to boycott the elections. The Roy faction, under former Senator Jose Roy, was the only opposition party accredited in the 1981 elections and is widely perceived by many Filipinos to be a dummy opposition party for the ruling KBL party. [redacted]

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Of the outcomes possible on 14 May, we think these are the ones to watch for:

The most likely outcome, in our view, is an overwhelming victory for the KBL in the provinces, with small opposition gains in urban areas in patently fraudulent elections.

In this case, the ruling party would win 80 to 85 percent of the vote. The opposition would wind up with no more than 20 seats, some of which would go to the Roy wing of the Nacionalista Party. Most opposition gains would come from the Western Visayas, Northern Mindanao, and Central Luzon (see map). The opposition is strongest in urban areas

[redacted] the KBL will probably allow the opposition to take no more than two seats out of the 21 at stake in the capital. Marcos will probably be willing to concede greater gains in other opposition strongholds such as Cebu (two seats) or Davao (two seats) where there are a smaller number of seats at stake and the prestige of the capital city is not an issue.

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Although we do not know how the public would react to blatant cheating by the KBL, we believe large demonstrations are a considerable risk. In any case, such an outcome would contribute to continuing political polarization. The moderate opposition, indeed, would be faced with the dilemma of deciding whether to serve in the new National Assembly.

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A less likely election outcome is a larger opposition minority representation in the new Assembly with the KBL winning key cities and provinces.

We believe that many moderate opponents of the regime would be satisfied with the results if the "true" opposition garnered at least 50 seats. Indeed, some moderates have cited this level as their benchmark for victory. This would help create the impression that the new National Assembly was more democratic. At the same time, the ruling party would retain a 65-to 75-percent majority, enabling Marcos to control the new National Assembly while continuing to pay lip service to pressures from the church, business community, and international creditors to allow greater opposition representation in the Assembly.

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In the unlikely event of a small KBL majority, we would expect to see the KBL remain in control of many of the provinces and take a majority of the seats in Manila.

In this case, we would expect to see a KBL majority of 55 to 60 percent. This outcome is possible only if COMELEC allows vigorous oversight at polling places and abides by most of the election code rules. The opposition would almost certainly take most of the seats in Central Luzon, Northern Mindanao and the Western Visayas. In any case, Marcos would find his authority, particularly within the ruling party, critically undermined after the election, diminishing his ability either to deal with the new Assembly or control the KBL caucus.

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After the Votes Are Counted

Confidence in Marcos's regime can be restored only if he allows the opposition parties to win a minority share of the electorate larger than they hold in the Interim Assembly and if the elections are perceived to be fair by Philippine standards. Charges of election rigging are certain in any event and, because public discontent with his rule remains widespread, Marcos will almost certainly achieve far less than he hopes for. On balance, we believe the election is unlikely to enhance the prospects for long-term political stability in the Philippines.

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Assuming our most likely scenario--a massive KBL win--we do not believe that the role of the National Assembly in Philippine politics will change in a major way. Even with a more independent KBL, the Assembly will remain under presidential control as long as Marcos retains his legislative powers. A KBL majority will ensure that most legislative horse-trading will continue to take place at ruling party caucuses. This would allow Marcos--as head of the ruling party--to direct policy and would prevent the opposition from building coalitions or forcing the resolution of issues through vigorous debate on the assembly's floor. If the opposition wound up with as many as 50 seats, however, its ability to call for impeachment proceedings would probably act as a constraint on Marcos's actions.

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A somewhat more independent KBL may emerge from the elections. The shift from regional to provincial voting districts forced Marcos to select more candidates belonging to influential local families, who would be able to finance their own campaigns, and fewer personal or party loyalists. As a result, we believe that some newly elected KBL assemblymen will be less subservient to Marcos. This will open the way for more divergent views within the party.

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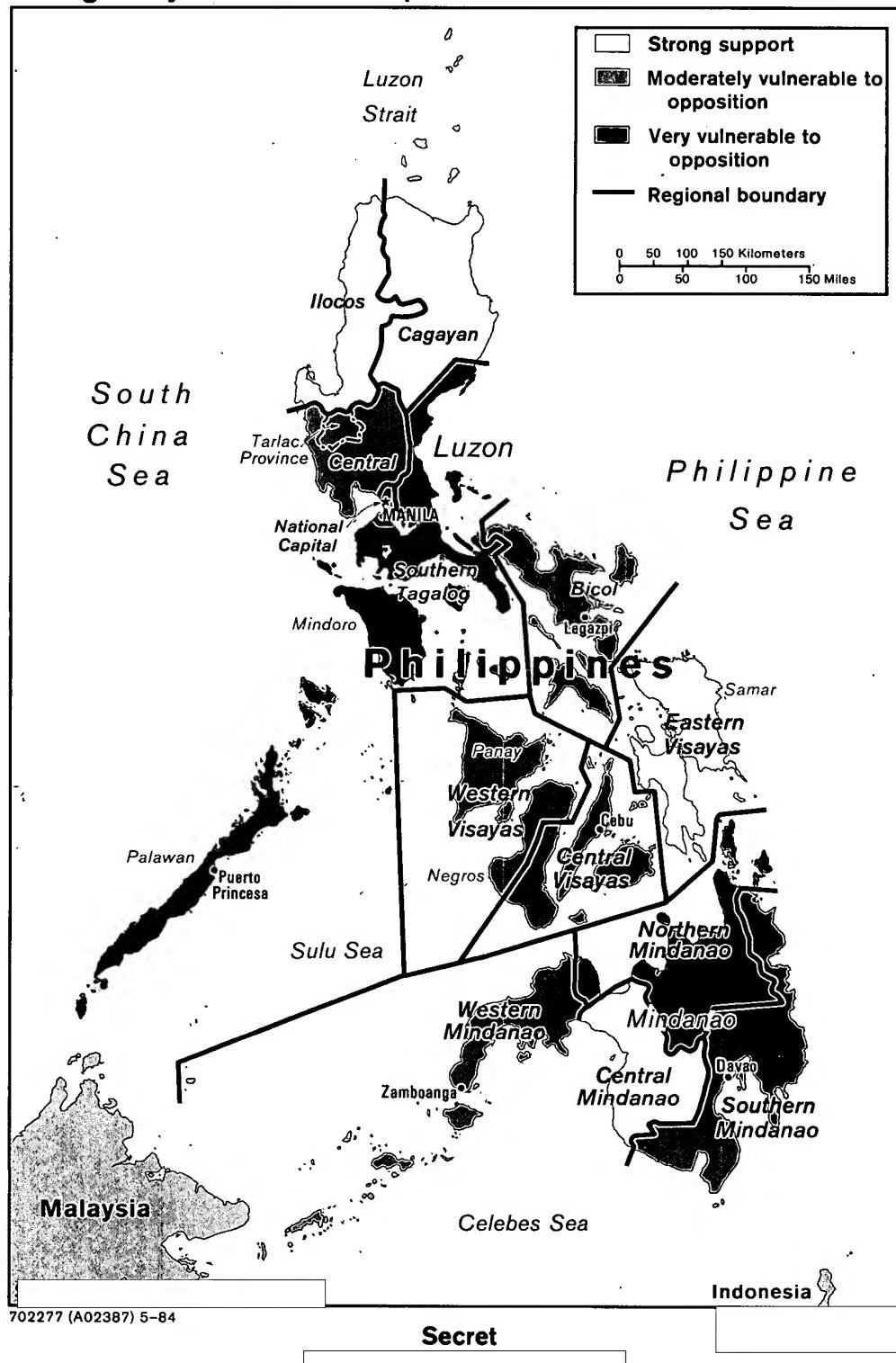
Once the election is over, the succession will again become the single most important issue in Philippine politics. Under a new succession arrangement approved in a national plebiscite earlier this year, the Speaker of the National Assembly will oversee a transition to new leadership if Marcos dies or becomes incapacitated before a Vice President is elected in 1987. The first task of the new Assembly will be the election of a new Speaker from within its ranks. The KBL and the opposition both view the selection of a new

Speaker as an important step in determining the outcome of a post-Marcos succession struggle. An overwhelming KBL victory will allow Marcos to choose the new Speaker from the ranks of KBL loyalists, thus ensuring his control over the succession process until the presidential elections in 1987. [redacted]

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MAJOR CONTENDERS

<u>Parties</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Key Players</u>	<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Weaknesses</u>
Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (KBL)	Ruling Party . . . composed of elements from the old Liberal and Nacionalista Parties... created by Marcos for the Interim National Assembly Elections in 1978.	President Marcos (Chairman) Imelda Marcos Eduardo Cojuangco Cesar Virata Benjamin Romualdez Arturo Tolentino	Strong party organization in provinces and cities . . . well financed and still enjoys the benefits of being Marcos's ruling party in some rural areas . . . Marcos co-opted the best of both the Nacionalista and Liberal Parties when he formed the KBL.	The party has been tainted by the Aquino assassination . . . unpopular in the cities and in many of the agricultural provinces . . . many KBL incumbents owe their seats directly to Marcos's influence and will lose without his continued support.
United Nationalist Democratic Organization (UNIDO)	12-party opposition coalition. represents the traditional political parties in Philippine politics . . . includes the remnants of: Nacionalista Party Liberal Party Mindanao Alliance	Salvador Laurel (Pres)(NP) Eva Estrada Kalaw (LP) Jose Laurel (NP)	Organized nationwide . . . hopes to capitalize on widespread anti-government sentiment.	Poor organization . . . serious rifts among the parties . . . lacks a unified national, campaign effort and adequate financing . . . is identified by many Filipinos with old-style politics and with being ineffective against Marcos.
Pilipino Democratic Party-LABAN (PDP-Laban)	Ideologically oriented party with collegial leadership . . . tends to be slightly left of center on the political spectrum and represents the newer "issue-oriented" parties formed in the past few years.	Aquillino Pimentel (Chairman) Jose Cojuangco Ramon Mitra Soc Rodrigo	Strongest organization is in the Visayas, on Mindanao, and in Manila . . . the party is concentrating its campaign and financing efforts in the regions where it is best organized . . . Laban is Benigno Aquino's old party.	Collegial leadership is making decisionmaking difficult . . . party leaders have been unable to form unified slates with UNIDO and are filing rival opposition slates in key areas such as Manila . . . this will weaken the opposition's chances . . . boycott issue has also taken its toll on leadership.
Roy Wing Nacionalista Party	No clear ideology or goal except to win seats in the election . . . formed to contests the KBL in the 1981 elections.	Jose Roy (President)	Many party members have close ties to the KBL and Marcos personally . . . will probably receive strong financing from KBL supporters who are unhappy with local ruling party candidates.	Widely perceived to be a "dummy" opposition group by many Filipinos . . . thus they will suffer their association with Marcos's government.

Secret**Ruling Party's Election Prospects****Secret**

The Philippines: Outlook for the National Assembly Elections.

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